

in conservation ownership, the Service contributed \$78,000 to gate the cave entrance and to assist SCC with the preparation and implementation of the CCAA.

As a result of removing the threats to the species through implementation of the CCAA, the Service removed the two beetle species from the candidate list in December 2005.



Gopher tortoise, by Rob Tawes/USFWS.

Gopher Tortoise CCA

The Candidate Conservation Agreement for the gopher tortoise, signed in 2008 and revised in 2009, is a cooperative effort among state, federal, non-governmental and private organizations to prevent the listing of the species found in its eastern range, which encompasses land east of the Mobile and Tombigbee Rivers in Alabama, Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. The purpose of the agreement is to collectively implement proactive conservation measures, leveraging knowledge and funding within a common conservation approach and framework. Under the agreement, the partners have collectively reported 4.5 million acres of potential habitat and approximately 24,338 gopher tortoises. They have conducted 390,000 acres of prescribed burning and restored 350,000 acres of habitat.

Because many of these conservation efforts have only just begun, threats remain. Those include habitat loss and degradation, predation, inadequacy of existing regulations, and incompatible use of herbicides in forest management. Nearly 90 percent of the gopher tortoise habitat is on private land, posing a significant conservation challenge.

In July 2011, the Service added the gopher tortoise found in its eastern range to the list of ESA candidates. The species is already listed as threatened in

Mississippi and Louisiana, and in Alabama west of the Tombigbee River.

Robust Redhorse CCA

The robust redhorse, not seen in more than a century, was rediscovered in the early 1990s in the Oconee River below a hydropower dam at Lake Sinclair. In 2002, a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances was signed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the landowner, Georgia Power, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Together, they agreed to establish a refugial population in the Ocmulgee River below Georgia Power's Lloyd Shoals Dam and increase understanding of habitat requirements and life history of the robust redhorse. Under the CCAA, Georgia DNR stocked the fish in the Ocmulgee, and Georgia Power is funding research studies of the Ocmulgee population.

In addition, beyond the CCAA, Georgia Power has modified hydro operations and funded many research studies in the Oconee. Georgia DNR, with funding from the Service, augmented gravel substrates in the Oconee and Ogeechee rivers. While the population appears to have declined in the Oconee, wild spawning populations have been rediscovered in the Pee Dee River in the Carolinas and the Savannah River on the Georgia-South Carolina border. Populations have been introduced to the Broad and Ogeechee rivers in Georgia by Georgia DNR, as well as the Broad and Wateree rivers in South Carolina by South Carolina DNR. There is evidence of spawning activity in most, if not all, of these rivers, and with funding from



Robust redhorse, by USFWS.



Aboriginal prickly-apple found on the Gulf coast of Florida. Only ten populations are left in the entire world, of which most are fewer than ten plants, by Dave Bender/USFWS.

many partners of the Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee, the long-term sustainability of these populations looks promising.

The robust redhorse has not been listed under the ESA. However, it was included in the Service's recent 90-day finding on the 374 aquatic and aquatic-dependent species in the Southeast and will undergo a status review some time after 2016.

For more information:

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Early Action: Candidate Conservation Agreements

“The goal of our conservation work together is to ensure sustainable fish and wildlife for the American people now and in the future. We should celebrate each time an imperiled species is given the chance to thrive, and acknowledge we fell short of our goal when a species needs Federal protection in order to survive.”

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Southeast Regional Director Cindy Dohner

Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is evaluating more than 435 species in the Southeast Region that may need protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Under a legal settlement approved by the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia in September 2011, the Service has until 2017 to make a final listing decision on 61 species in the Southeast. These candidate species are fish, wildlife and plants for which the Service has enough information regarding their biological status and threats to propose protection under the ESA. They have not been listed because higher priority listing activities have taken precedence. As candidates, these species do not have the benefit of legal protections.

Only after final determinations are made on those 61 southeastern, candidate species will work start on assessing the status of another 374 southeastern species, all of which are aquatic or aquatic-dependent. The Service issued a 90-day finding on these species in



Of the 290 species of amphibians and reptiles that occur in the Southeast, 170 are found in the longleaf pine forest. Less than 4 percent of the forest remains of its historical range of 90 million acres stretching from Virginia to Florida and across to Texas, by Randy Browning/USFWS.

September 2011, in response to a petition. In the finding, or initial review, the Service said it needs to undertake a more thorough status review of the species before determining whether to propose any for listing.

Two Tools

As the Service's Southeast Region works with our partners to gather the science and expend resources needed to conserve more than 435 species identified, we are also taking proactive steps to prevent the need to list these species. Some of these species may need Federal protection despite our best efforts, but our goal is to keep as many off the list as possible. The fewer species that need ESA protection,

Every species deserves a chance.

the more successful the conservation community’s efforts will have been.



Bartram’s hairstreak butterfly on Big Pine Key in Florida, by Holly Salvato.

Two of the many tools that have proven useful in benefiting candidate and imperiled species are Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs). These are formal, voluntary conservation agreements between the Service and Federal agencies, States, Tribes and non-governmental organizations that commit to implement specific actions designed to remove or reduce threats to the covered species on Federal and non-Federal land, including private land.

Together, the partners can take proactive steps to enhance fish, wildlife and their habitats. In creating conservation agreements, the partners:

- Identify threats to the species;
- Plan the conservation measures needed to address those threats (e.g. restoring riparian areas);
- Solicit public comments;
- Identify landowners interested in conserving species;
- Design and implement conservation measures; and
- Monitor their effectiveness.

The Service has entered into more than 100 CCAs since 1994, and 25 CCAAs since 2000. More than 160 species of fish, wildlife and plants have benefitted. Early action gives species conservation the best chance of success. Some agreements have been so effective in removing threats to the species that listing has not been necessary.

Proactive conservation actions also increase the likelihood that simpler, more cost-effective conservation options are available. In addition, resource managers and property owners have more flexibility to manage their resources and use their land, now and in the future.

CCAs and CCAAs

Candidate Conservation Agreements foster cooperation and exchange of ideas among multiple parties interested in common goals for conserving fish, wildlife and their habitats. These agreements can be between the Service and any other public or private entity, including another Federal agency. The degree of detail in the agreements can vary widely. The species covered in the agreement do not have to be candidates for the Endangered Species list, but they should be considered at-risk for listing. For example, they could be State-listed species, imperiled species, or species of concern.

If the species covered in a CCA does eventually have to be listed under the ESA, the Service provides no assurances or waivers regarding regulations that may be required as a result.

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances are similar to CCAs, with one exception: They also provide incentives – in the form of a permit – to non-Federal property owners who engage in voluntary conservation activities for a particular species. If the species has to be listed under the ESA, participants are assured of regulatory certainty and receive what is called an Enhancement of Survival Permit to cover their ongoing land and/or water use. That means no additional conservation actions would be



Black pine snake, a candidate species found in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, by Bill Finch/TNC.

required of the non-Federal participant beyond what was agreed upon in the CCAA, and the Service would not impose additional limitations on the land, water or resource.

Due to specific Federal requirements under the ESA, Federal landowners are not eligible to receive these assurances or waivers.



Florida bonneted bat, a candidate species, © by Ralph Arwood.

Examples of Conservation Activities

As part of the conservation agreements, participants agree to engage in specific activities to improve habitats for fish and wildlife. These can include:

- Restoring and expanding habitats;
- Restoring stream banks and riparian buffers;
- Creating wildlife corridors;
- Reestablishing populations or augmenting existing populations;
- Controlling invasive plants and animals;
- Prescribed burning; and
- Curtailing pollution.

Benefits of Conservation Agreements Species

Fish, wildlife and their habitats should benefit in improved chances for their long-term survival. If the conservation measures prove effective, threats to the species should be reduced or eliminated. As a result, the species may not need the ultimate Federal protection, which is to be listed under the ESA.



Bottomland hardwoods by Tom MacKenzie/USFWS.

States

States are equal partners with the Service in these agreements. They can initiate a conservation agreement for a species or a group of species in the same habitat, and they have the authority to enroll landowners. Importantly, the States can retain management of their species. Many of the candidate and at-risk species that can be covered under a CCA or CCAA are also identified as priorities in State Wildlife Action Plans.

If States participate in a CCAA as a landowner or land manager, they can also receive regulatory certainty and cost containment if the species requires Federal protection.

Landowners

Landowners, including States, private entities and other non-Federal landowners, are assured of regulatory certainty and cost containment when they sign on to a CCAA. From the outset, they know and have agreed to the specific

conservation measures they will need to implement on their properties. Some of these measures may be activities they are already engaged in, such as Best Management Practices for Forestry.

NGOs

Non-governmental organizations may also be equal partners with the Service. Like the States, they can initiate conservation agreements and enroll landowners if they have the required resources and authority within their organizations.

Federal agencies

Federal agencies that participate in conservation agreements may have greater flexibility in how they manage their land for species conservation in the future, to help try and prevent the need for an ESA listing. From the outset, Federal agencies work with the Service to determine the best course of conservation action on their land.

The Public

Benefits to the public include cost-effective conservation actions designed to enhance fish, wildlife and their habitats for future generations of Americans. Wildlife improves the quality of human life, from offering natural filters for air and water to providing cures for diseases. Saving species enhances our own long-term survivability and enjoyment of this planet. In addition, the more we can prevent the need to protect species under the ESA, the fewer regulations will be placed on landowners, hunters, anglers, and others who interact with those species.

Examples of Conservation Agreements Adams Cave Beetles CCAA

The greater Adams Cave beetle and lesser Adams Cave beetle are known to live only in Adams Cave in the Bluegrass Region of central Kentucky, near Richmond. These small, predatory beetles were first discovered in 1964 in the cave, which is on private property. Over the years, people trespassed on the property to camp inside the cave, vandalizing and degrading the habitats inside. Consequently, the two cave beetle species had not been found for a number of years. Based on these threats, the Service made them candidates for ESA listing.

In February 2005, a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances was signed with the Southern Conservation Corporation, a non-profit land trust which had received a one-acre donation of land from the owners, including the only known entrance to Adams Cave. Once Adams Cave was



Greater Adams Cave beetle, found only in one cave in Kentucky, by Brent Harrel/ USFWS.